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## City park rangers tell Mayor Hales they want a union

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They're "good will ambassadors" for the City of Portland. Wearing a uniform and a badge and working in pairs, they keep parks safe and clean, and serve as the front line of outreach to the homeless. Yet most of the City's park rangers make \$11 an hour, have no benefits, and get laid off after nine months. Could they please have a union now? That was the message a group of park rangers presented in a March 29 meeting with Mayor Charlie Hales.

"It was nice for him to take the time to meet with us," says ranger Sam Sachs. "Unfortunately, they didn't agree to recognize the union."

Every one of the City's 15 rangers signed a card saying they want to join Laborers Local 483, says Local 483 organizer Erica Askin, and nothing restricts the City from granting union recognition at that point.

"We certainly favor the workers' ability to join a union," said Hales' spokesperson Dana Haynes, "and we look forward to the park rangers being part of the Laborers union." However,

Haynes explained, the mayor believes workers should unionize through a secret ballot election, not "card check." A 2007 amendment to Oregon's Public Employee Collective Bargaining Act gave public employees the right to unionize through card check, but public employers can still refuse that method and insist on an election in cases where workers are seeking to join an existing union.

For the rangers, it makes a difference: Having the state Employment Relations Board schedule a union election delays the process by a month or two. And that's a problem for the 11 of the 15 rangers who are classified as "seasonal" employees, most of whom will be long gone by the end of the year. City rules require that the seasonals be laid off after 1,400 hours, the equivalent of eight months at 40 hours a week.

Making seasonal jobs permanent would be the Number One goal once they get a union.

"We're a unified group, the seasonals and the full-timers," says Sachs. "All of us who are permanent were seasonal

(Turn to Page 2)



**Uniformed city park rangers argued that they've earned the right to permanent employment, and union representation, at a March 29 meeting with Portland Mayor Charlie Hales. By all accounts, Hales was cordial and a good listener, but in the end, rangers got the message: The City won't voluntarily recognize their union; they'll have to show a majority through a state-supervised election.**

## TriMet: Labor Press can observe bargaining, but bloggers out

### Local 757 president adds former rival Heintzman to bargaining team in show of unity

At an April 27 meeting to discuss bargaining ground rules, TriMet management cleared up which media it wanted to exclude from observing labor negotiations: gadfly bloggers, and the Northwest Labor Press.

Alert Labor Press readers will remember that TriMet and Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 757 are in court over whether the public can be excluded from their union contract negotiations. Customarily, such talks are closed to non-participants by mutual agreement, but as Local 757 pointed out, state law says that public sector collective bargaining is by default *open* to the public unless both parties agree to close it. This time, Local 757 wants them open to the public, whereas TriMet has proposed the talks be observed only by certain media.

Bargaining was supposed to begin last November, but Local 757 initially declined to meet until the public access issue was resolved. Both sides pushed for an expedited court decision. But when the judge determined in early April that the case

would not be decided speedily, the union decided it was better to start bargaining while still waiting for the court decision.

TriMet had proposed at the outset that access be limited to "unaffiliated" media, a choice of language that the union interpreted as an attempt to exclude the Northwest Labor Press. TriMet later revised that language, proposing instead to allow the "mainstream media" to attend — seemingly a swipe at critics on the left and right, to say nothing of bloggers and other "new media." In effect, a tax-supported local government entity, its board appointed by the governor of Oregon, is proposing to pick and choose which press to grant access to, while keeping the general public out.

Local 757 asked TriMet to identify which media it considered mainstream. TriMet declined to do that, and the union suggested its own list of 16 print and online media outlets, including the Labor Press, plus television news generally.

"We have no particular interest in limiting attendance only to specifically named media organizations," replied labor relations director Randy Stedman in an April 18 letter to the union, "but instead prefer to have a mutually agreed ground rule that defines the media for purposes of attending and reporting on the proceedings. Any press or-

ganization meeting the definition agreed to should be able to attend." Details, Stedman wrote, would be revealed at the closed-to-the-press ground-rule-setting session April 27, held at a secure location owned by TriMet in the vicinity of Lloyd Center.

### Ron Heintzman returns

Just as the meeting began, Local 757 President Bruce Hansen made a surprise announcement: He would be adding former Local 757 president and ATU International Union president Ron Heintzman — his rival in last year's union election — to the bargaining team. "We are a union family," Hansen explained in a written statement, "and when a family is threatened, differences in opinion need to be put aside, and we all need to work together to protect the family. In this case, TriMet has already signaled its intent to devastate its employees both financially and in the quality of their working conditions.... Ron Heintzman has bargained every TriMet contract since 1988. Management is trying to destroy all those gains."

At the meeting, true to promise, TriMet detailed its suggested press ground rule: "representatives of the news media," the public transit district proposed, would be defined as "a news-gathering representative of a commercial enterprise that ordi-

narily reports mainstream news in traditional print, FCC-licensed broadcast, or subscription electronic magazine format."

Stedman told the union bargaining team that neither the Labor Press nor the Portland Business Journal would meet that definition because they're specialized, not "mainstream." However, TriMet would make an exception, he said, and let the Labor Press and Business Journal attend. That would be contingent, in the union's understanding, on certain bloggers being excluded.

"Which bloggers?" the union wanted to know, listing three by name that had been quite critical of TriMet. Stedman, furious and using the "F" word, declared the meeting over.

That meant that no negotiation sessions were scheduled, something Local 757 had expected to happen during the ground rule setting meeting.

Stedman emailed Hansen the next day saying TriMet is still ready to bargain, and that he still hopes they can reach agreement "to open otherwise closed negotiations to the mainstream press."

"Once we have the union's proposals and a reasonable opportunity to review them, we are willing to schedule substantive negotiations," Stedman wrote.

(Turn to Page 2)